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ABSTRACT

The Thomas Jefferson Junior High School and Community Center was conceived to accommodate combined services while conserving land and funds. The objective was to create a "community growth center" to be primarily an educational plant with focus on the middle years of youth as well as providing a "school for people" with interests for all ages. School and county agencies joined forces to acquaint the public with the "community center concept." These agencies consented to a mutual acceptance of architects and consultants, and to joint planning, facility use, and participation in reviewing the development of construction documents. The functions and the members of committees involved in the project are listed. (Author/MLF)

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THE ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA STORY

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Council of Educational Facility Planners
Workshop, April 20, 1971
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee

During this workshop program, you have heard the reasons described why Educational Planners must work more closely with those who plan to satisfy other human needs and other human wants.

We are rapidly reaching a point of scarcity in available lands and we must maximize site utilization. All government agencies are in the competition for funding - in fact, the U.S. taxpayer may become the first national resource to be depleted. There is a strong need to consider means of reducing travel and bringing more community services closer to more community patrons.

The Thomas Jefferson Junior High School and Community Center in Arlington was conceived to accommodate combined services while conserving land and funds. Our objective was to create a "community growth center" which is to be primarily an educational plant with focus on middle years of youth but also a "school for people" with interests for all ages.

Background

In Arlington, there is little land available. 185,000 residents are compressed into less than 20 square miles. The road network occupies a substantial part of the available land and services about 3/4 of the half million automobiles which daily cross the Potomac River from Northern Virginia to Washington, D. C.

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Efforts to accomplish fiscal and administrative gains through cooperative efforts, merging of services, and pooling of resources has been evident in Arlington County for many years. In 1944, a Recreation Council was established to facilitate the mutual use of buildings and grounds by school and recreational agencies. In 1958, a "joint use of facilities agreement" was executed to extend the initial agreement to other County agencies. In addition, there is a policy under which other organizations may affiliate with the Department of Environmental Affairs and receive financial support as well as the free use of facilities under the same conditions as prevail for County agencies.

In 1966, the School and County General Government developed a single playfield project with each contributing land for the purpose of making a single project available for the school and community use.

There is extensive use of Arlington's schools and grounds. School grounds are not reserved for use by anyone except the organized recreational program. School buildings are available to the Recreation Department and other County agencies including those groups which are affiliated with the Recreation Department on a no-cost basis except for out of pocket additional costs. Recreation lands and/or buildings are made available to school programs on exactly the same basis. Every elementary school has an indoor playground program during the Spring and an outdoor program in the Summer and early Fall months. Every secondary school has an open gym program every week-end and on holidays all year long. Certain shops such as automobile, carpentry, etc. are open for community use for hobbies and home repairs at scheduled times. The Recreation Department pays the instructors to supervise the use; the Schools provide the facilities and equipment. A rental policy is in effect to permit other non-affiliated organizations the use of facilities.

The Thomas Jefferson Project

The present plant of T.J. is comprised of two buildings approximately one mile apart. In 1965 a bond issue which would have provided a new facility on a new site failed primarily because of integration arguments. In the Fall of 1966, a Citizens Advisory Committee, including some who had been against the original bond issue, was appointed by the School Board and they considered several alternatives for resolving the school problem.

Other community forces were at work at the same time. Some were interested in devoting the proposed 26 acre tract for recreation or other purposes exclusive of schools. In order to avoid the battle which was then brewing between School and Recreation interests in competition for this attractive site, joint use of the site was proposed as a compromise. School and County agencies joined forces and a concentrated effort was made by all concerned to acquaint the public with the "community center concept".

The County and School Boards consented to a "Memo of Understanding" calling for:

1. Joint use of the new facility;

2. Joint planning;

3. Mutual acceptance of architects and consultants;

4. Joint participation in reviewing the development of construction documents; and

5. Designation of the Assistant Superintendent of Schools as the Owner's representative for the project.

A bond issue was approved which provided for a basic 4.15 million dollar junior high school with 2.5 million dollar recreational package. All funds were then deposited in a special school construction fund to be disbursed in accordance with the policies of the School Board.

Mechanics of Cooperative Planning

While the "Memo of Understanding" was the first step in establishing the mechanics of cooperation in this concept, other activities took place which contributed even more to the success of this project. These activities involved elected officials, staff people, citizens, youth, organized groups, and consultants.

County Manager's Representative

The County Manager designated a member of his staff to represent him and all County agencies in the planning of the project. This person served these functions:

1. He was alert to the need for and responsible to inform and seek reaction from all appropriate County agencies;

2. He served as the moderator in all bureaucratic disputes which arose;

3. He kept the Manager informed and could speak for the Manager thus assuring greater cooperation;

4. He could interpret the concerns of review agencies with respect to the project.

Arlington uses several planning committees. For the T.J. project there was:

an Ad Hoc Committee on School Construction

composed of citizens, architects, engineers and builders to advise on:

a) methods of selecting, compensating, and working with architects;

b) criteria for: -basic structural shapes
-materials quality range;

c) supervision and inspection of construction.

Staff (Project) Planning Committee

Composed of:
-principal of school involved
-principal of school recently improved
-principal of school to be improved
-various teachers
-specialized area supervisors
-Director of Elementary or Secondary Programs
-County Manager's representative

Function: To develop detailed statement of functional space and equipment needs

Termination: When detailed statement is communicated to the architect

Further Involvement: The chairman of the General Planning Committee keeps the Staff Planning Committee advised of progress as the completion of the preliminary and final plans are designed

Citizens' Advisory Committees

Composed of:
-PTA appointees, or
-School Board appointees, or
--Other interested groups

Function: To identify and report building needs

Involvement with Architect: This will take place as a part of the Staff Planning Committee communicates its detailed statement to the architect

Review of Progress: It is the responsibility of the principal (or Planning Committee Chairman) to keep the Citizens' Committees advised of progress in the development of the project

General Planning Committee

Composed of:

-Director of Elementary or Secondary Programs
-various principals
-various supervisors

Function:

To review detailed statements of functional space and equipment needs as submitted by Project Planning Committee

Coordinates and consolidates the statements in re: the long-range goals of the school system

Responsibilities:

Chairman and Administrative Staff reviews detailed statement of functional needs with architect (Administrative Staff consists of Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, and Assistant Superintendents)

Committee reviews preliminary layout and prepares reactions for administrative staff

Chairman and administrative staff reviews with architect the preliminary layout and outline specifications

Chairman assists administrative staff and architect in working out changes to preliminary layout and specifications after School Board reviews

Chairman reviews with administrative staff and architect, final drawings and specifications

Chairman and administrative staff conduct critique of procedures used

Termination:

Committee ceases active influence after reviewing preliminary layout and preparing reactions for administrative staff <u>but</u> Chairman continues to function with administrative staff throughout procedure and keeps committee informed

The Educational Facilities Laboratory made a grant of $15,000 or about 1/4 of 1% of the cost of this project for planning purposes. With this funding we have been able to achieve highly desirable results which would probably not have been otherwise available. One of these was in the form of national tours to investigate "the state of the art". While on-site inspections of community schools, innovative structures, and unusual materials was valuable, the greatest value achieved was the traveling and living together of influential people who were involved with the project but who would normally not meet together on a regular basis for a prolonged period. These included members of the County Board and the School Board; members of the County staff and the School staff; and members of the architectural firm engaged for the project. These resulted in better working relationships during the planning stages and will have lasting effects on the programs to be operated in this new facility.

The EFL grant also made possible a charrette designed along the lines of the architectural charrette rather than the educational charrette. The educational charrette is a "technique for studying and resolving educational facility development problems within the context of total community planning needs". On the other hand, an architectural charrette is "a final intensive effort to finish an architectural design project before a deadline". We took the latter concept and brought together for a two day period, approximately 50 people from the following groups to critique the preliminary designs:

-architect
-educational consultants
-educational specialists or practitioners
-recreational consultants
-recreational specialists or practioners
-elected County officials
-youth of the junior high school age
-Superintendent and County Manager
-division chiefs
-Education Association
-PTA officers
-School Study Council representatives
-civic organization representatives

The six consultants whose fees and expenses were paid to participate in this charrette were instructed to challenge every aspect of the preliminary plans and broaden our thinking. We believe that this resulted in a facility which will not "do something" but rather "will not prevent something from being done".

Conclusion

We believe that we have broken down walls which existed between planners of educational facilities - other governmental agencies - and the patrons.

We believe that we are building a facility which is flexible enough to serve its designed functions well and will also satisfy other community needs as they arise.

It has been a wonderful experience and we know it was successful because we now have three swimming pools out to bid under the same cooperative arrangements, and we also have a library project in the study stage.

There are brochures here describing the Thomas Jefferson project and its constantly changing use pattern. I will be happy to respond to any questions you wish to raise.

* * *

JR:jm
4/8/71